

"Footprints"

Episode #209

<Shortly After #208>

[Previously ...](#)

**Sarah's comment about Molly and Brent shocked -- and baffled -- the whole family.*

**Andy, Brent, and Maggie tried to convince Katherine to leave Nick.*

**Nick and Ryan heard Katherine shout that the mansion is on fire!*

FITCH MANSION

Smoke floods down the hallway, closing in on Nick and Ryan. The smell, the heat, the stuffy air -- all of it is rapidly surrounding them. No flames are visible yet, but both men know it is only a matter of moments.

"How the hell are we gonna get out of here?" Ryan asks, coughing out the words from behind his forearm.

Nick looks back at his son over his shoulder. "I'll push my way through. Just follow me."

Ryan draws in yet another gulp of air, hoping that he'll be able to hold his breath long enough this time that he won't have to keep breathing the polluted air. The smoke is beginning to scratch at his throat and lungs, and he lets loose with a deep cough as he follows close behind Nick.

Nick is forcing his way down the hallway, moving right into the oncoming storm of smoke. But the men stop in their tracks when they hear the scream.

"Nick! Help!"

Nick's head darts around frantically, hoping to find Katherine somewhere in the cloud.

"Katherine!" he calls back.

"Nick!" she shouts. "Help me!" Her cries are somehow muffled, almost remote-sounding.

He has to bring his arm back in front of his face as he responds. "Where are you?"

A response comes back, but Nick isn't sure what it is. He turns back to Ryan, who is desperately trying to shield himself.

"Did you hear her?" he asks, realizing that he now has to raise his voice even to talk to

Ryan, who is less than a foot from him.

"I think she said she's in the guest bedroom," Ryan half-yells.

Nick looks as though he's going to ask Ryan for more details, but then he turns outward again. "Katherine! Can you hear me? Which room are you in?"

Her reply is muted even more now, but Nick is able to make out the words. "The guest bedroom!" she shouts. "The one at the end of the hallway!"

"Oh, jeez," Nick says, partly to himself and partly to Ryan.

Ryan leans in closer. "What?"

"She's all the way at the other end of the hall! We have to get past the staircase and all the way down there to get to her!"

"Can we even do that?" Ryan wonders aloud, surveying the now-dense fog of smoke that has overtaken the hallway. He can barely see more than a few feet in front of him and he can only imagine how far the end of the hall is going to seem in these conditions.

"We have to," Nick says. He continues moving forward, holding one arm behind him as if to shield Ryan and keep him with him.

"Katherine!" Nick calls out. "We're coming!"

No sooner has the cry left Nick's mouth than do both men see an orange light rip through the curtains of gray that are engulfing them. Ryan gasps just as another flame tears across the hallway.

"I'm coming!" Nick yells back to Katherine.

There is no response for what feels to Nick like minutes and minutes, even though he is fairly certain it is no more than a few seconds. He forges ahead, grasping onto Ryan behind him and trying to cover himself with his front arm.

Finally Katherine does reply, her voice worn thin with terror. "Get out! Save yourself, Nick! Leave me here!"

"No! Ryan and I are coming for you!"

"Don't!" comes the instantaneous response. "Don't worry about me! Get out while you

can!"

FITCH MANSION

"I guess we should get out of here, huh?" Brent says, breaking the silence that has settled over the kitchen.

"I suppose so," Andy says after a slight hesitation. He moves away from the counter, on which he has been leaning, but other than that gives no indication that he is actually planning to leave.

Maggie can see what is going on, and she places a hand gently on his arm. "C'mon. She's not going to come down with a verdict in five minutes. She needs some time to think right now."

Andy nods, agreeing, and begins to move out of the kitchen. He and Maggie walk side-by-side, with Brent a little bit in front of them.

The moment they cross into the dining room, Brent freezes. Andy and Maggie put on the brakes behind him.

"What is it?" Andy asks.

"Smoke!" Brent points towards the living room, which stands between them and the foyer. As far as they can see, thick smoke has taken hold of the living room and is now drifting menacingly into the dining room -- and towards them.

Andy looks back into the kitchen and finds that the smoke -- accompanied by flames -- are moving in from the other side, as well. "My God, the house is on fire!"

Brent covers himself with his arms and begins to forge a path forward. "Come on, guys, follow me! We just have to get to the door--" A bulge of smoke comes right at him and he coughs roughly.

"Can we get out of here?" Maggie calls to him, a strong note of panic creeping into her voice. Andy's arm, which has been draped over her shoulders, pulls her tighter into him, and she accepts the gesture gladly.

"We have to," Brent tells them, moving closer to the living room. "Just stay close behind me! It's not that far!"

They make it to the entrance of the living room, but stop suddenly when a trail of flames

sears its way across the living room carpet. The smoke is much thicker in here, and it has cast such a heavy black mist over the room that it is impossible to see much at all -- and even if the effort were made, the only reward might be a pair of stinging eyes.

Flames have begin to whip wildly around the room, and Brent pauses to search for a path that will get them out of here. Finally he moves forward tentatively, trying to cover his head so that he can look up and navigate through the precious little space that is visible to him.

Andy pulls himself closer to Maggie as a curtain beside him erupts into flame. "How are we going to get out of here?"

"We will!" Brent assures him, yelling now through the curls of smoke. He takes another step forward and feels himself ram into something.

"What's wrong?" Andy calls out.

"There's something in the way. A--a chair," Brent says, trying to use his eyes and his hands to discern the contours of the object. When he is sure that no part of it has caught fire yet -- miraculously, he thinks -- he settles his hands upon the arms to pick it up and move it.

As he lifts the chair out of the way, he hears Maggie's horrified cry rip through the dirty air. "Brent!"

He looks up quickly, and as a wave of terror floods his body, he covers his head with his arms again and tries to move out of the way. But it is too late -- the chandelier comes crashing down, slamming into his back, and he crumples to the charred carpet.

FISHER HOME

As Paula turns off the sink, she hears the steps of bare feet on the tile of the kitchen floor. She turns and sees Molly, who has changed into a pair of plaid pajama pants and a white tank top. Their gazes meet for a brief moment before Molly pulls away.

Molly reaches into the refrigerator, hidden partially by the open door, and rummages for something. Paula continues to watch her daughter, and when Molly emerges with a bottle of water, she cannot ignore Paula's stare.

"Mom? Are you okay?"

Paula quickly shakes her head, as if trying to free herself from the disturbing thoughts

that have seized her mind tonight, and looks down at the dish that she is drying. "Of course. I--I was just thinking ... It was nice to have everyone together tonight, wasn't it?"

Molly delays a moment before nodding. "Yeah, it was."

"I noticed that you got a chance to talk to Claire," Paula says, trying to swim through the murky awkwardness that came into the room with Molly. "She seemed to be doing well, didn't she?"

"Yeah ... Obviously she's still having a hard time dealing with Tim being gone, but she didn't seem as withdrawn as you said she'd been lately."

"No, she did seem better. I think it was good for her to have the chance to talk with you. She's been so removed from all of us ..."

It's clear to Molly what is hanging between them, and it has been gnawing at her mind since before she walked into the kitchen. Now she feels as if she can't ignore it any longer.

"I know where you're trying to steer this," she says suddenly.

Paula is very much caught off-guard and it shows. "What?"

"You want to know what Claire and I talked about when--when I left the dinner table ... Right?"

The older woman struggles with herself and with the memory of Sarah's outburst. "Molly ... I worry about you kids. You know that. And especially since we lost Tim ... I can't help it. And it was pretty clear to me--to all of us--tonight that things aren't quite right between you and Sarah."

"Sarah and I have always been like that."

Paula knows that that's true, but ... this is somehow different, more worrisome. Slowly she says, "What Sarah said -- it could have some serious ramifications. And tonight I got the distinct impression that none of us really know the whole story."

She waits for some confirmation, but Molly offers none. Finally Paula forces out the question: "Did you have something to do with Sarah and Brent's marriage ending?"

FITCH MANSION

The chandelier strikes Brent with what sounds to Maggie like a sickening thud. She screams his name again as he hits the ground.

She and Andy stand, frozen, waiting for him to move, to get up and shake it off, but of course it doesn't happen. And once that static moment has passed, they rush towards him.

"Brent!" Andy calls out. "Brent, can you hear me?"

When there is no answer, Maggie lets out a horrified, "Oh no."

Andy pushes the chandelier, which is lying over Brent's body, out of the way. He touches Brent lightly, cautiously, not really sure that he should do anything.

"Brent!" Maggie tries again. "Are you--Can you hear me?"

But still, no response.

Maggie coughs as some of the smoke creeps inside of her. She turns to Andy. "What do we do?"

He fumbles for an answer. When he is able to produce one, it comes out very tentatively. "A phone. We need a phone. We need to call 911."

"Here--" Maggie reaches down to her side but finds nothing. "Crap! I left my purse in the car."

"We've got to get out there." He rises to his feet carefully, bringing her up with him.

"You mean, leave him here?"

"We have to. We can't move him -- it's not safe. And I doubt we could get him out of here anyway. We need to get outside and call 911."

He is already dragging her through the smog, trying desperately to avoid contact with the flames. She shrieks as something else falls from above, but Andy pulls her in closer and she is safe.

Both of them are coughing heavily as they stagger through the other end of the living room and into the foyer. Andy reaches for the front door -- it's so close -- but he remembers a vague bit of knowledge about doorknobs and fires.

"What are you waiting for?" Maggie snaps, looking back at the living room as flames tear it to pieces. She can't even see Brent anymore.

Andy doesn't answer the question. Looking around desperately, he finally lets Maggie go just long enough so that he can wriggle out of his jacket. Silently thanking the Northwest climate that can demand a jacket even in June, he wraps the jacket over his hand and knocks the deadbolt out of place. Then he reaches down, grappling through the fabric for the lower lock. He gets a grip on it and turns it, and with a twist of the doorknob, the cool outdoor air comes spilling into the house.

Maggie practically pushes him out the door. Still clinging together, they stumble down the stone path back to the driveway.

Andy's body feels numb, but somehow they make their way to the car in what seems to be a very short amount of time. He finds the keys in his pocket and unlocks the door. In a flash, Maggie is inside and has her hands on her purse. She comes back out with her cellular phone an instant later and is already dialing.

Andy turns back to the house. Flames are furiously leaping from some of the windows and smoke is rising from the house with an alarming urgency. He watches, transfixed, as the fire devours the place he knew as home for so long.

And suddenly, a burst of panic -- bubbling for so long, since the very first sight of the flames, but only now able to emerge -- surges through his body. His eyes begin to search the upstairs windows frantically as he listens to Maggie making the call.

"Mother," he gasps desperately.

FISHER HOME

The cap on her bottle of water seems to hold some great interest for Molly, who is very intently unscrewing it.

"Molly," Paula says a little more insistently. "Did you--"

"Sarah ended that marriage herself," Molly cuts in suddenly. "She slept with Matt and then she lied about her pregnancy and about Victoria."

Paula is a little taken aback by the force in Molly's voice. After a moment of quiet reaction, she says, "Sarah certainly made some mistakes, but ..."

"But nothing! She's the one responsible for her marriage falling apart."

"So you mean to tell me," Paula says, tilting her head suggestively, "that if Sarah hadn't made those mistakes, everything would be perfectly fine in her marriage to Brent?"

Now it is Molly's turn to be caught off-guard. She toys with the water bottle again, screwing the cap back on. "I'm not sa--No, of course not. Every marriage has problems. And if Sarah didn't make the mistakes she made, what's to say she wouldn't make some other ones?"

"Nothing, I suppose," Paula admits with a half-shrug. "But the mistakes she did make -- why did she make them?"

"Because--" Molly appears to be choking on the words as her face turns a darker shade of pink. Her hands have turned into tightly bound fists and she raises one as she blasts, "Because she's Sarah! Everyone's making her out to be some kind of victim--"

"And who's 'everyone'?"

Molly closes her eyes, keeping herself from a further outburst. She ungrits her teeth and tries to relax her hands.

"Look," she finally says, "I don't--I can't talk about this right now." And she is out of the room and headed up the stairs before Paula can react.

FITCH MANSION

The sounds of crackling and sizzling are jumping in Ryan's ears. The heat has escalated to the point where he actually feels as though breathing may become impossible at any moment. And his eyes are scanning the hallway in terror as the flames ravage the carpet and scorch the walls.

"I'm not leaving, Katherine!" Nick is shouting.

His wife's response isn't as automatic this time. "Please, go! Save yourselves!"

Ryan places a hand on his father's shoulder and leans in. "Maybe she's right," he huffs, hardly able to believe that he is actually saying that.

Nick turns back to him furiously. "What? Are you insane, Ryan? I am not leaving her here!"

"But--" It takes Ryan a moment to force out the thought, but he knows he's thinking it and pretending otherwise isn't going to get him anywhere, especially if Nick's life is on the line. "Dad, if she doesn't make it -- the money ..."

He can tell that the idea isn't completely disgusting to Nick, but then Katherine lets out another terrified cry.

"No," Nick says. "I'm going in there to get her." He begins to move down the hall again.

"Dad!" Ryan calls out after him. His voice bears a strong hint of desperation as he adds, "You're going to get yourself killed! We could just go outside and call 911 -- someone would probably get here in time to get her out--"

"No! I'm not leaving her to die! I'm not even taking the chance!"

Ryan stands frozen for a split-second, watching Nick pushing his way through the smoke and fire.

"Be careful, Dad!" he shouts, and then he begins to follow Nick again.

FITCH MANSION

The night air is cool, but all Andy can feel is the heat radiating from the house. His stare is unbroken as he watches the house falling to the flames, giving in under the heat and the intensity and being stripped down to a charred shell of its former self.

He hears Maggie finish the 911 call and realizes that he is already listening for the sound of sirens.

Maggie comes up behind him and rests a warm hand on his shoulder. "Everything's gonna be fine."

"I hope so." He risks a momentary glance away from the burning house and finds her deep, brown eyes. He feels a flicker of comfort -- just a flicker -- and says, "My mother is in there somewhere. I should have--"

She silences him with a squeeze on his upper arm. "You never would've been able to get to her. The fire department will be here in a minute. They'll get her out."

"They have to. I can't lose her this way."

Maggie is about to rest her chin on his shoulder when he moves, taking a step closer to the mansion.

"And Brent, too," he says. "They have to get him out."

"They will."

A moment passes as his mind echoes the sentiment, offering it up to Heaven as a prayer, and then he shakes his head. "I don't understand how this happened. What could have started this?"

"I don't know. I don't know ... Maybe it was a wiring thing or something. It could have been a million things."

"Yeah." Andy breathes in deeply, trying to replace the smoky feeling that has spread through his body with some fresh air. "Where is the damned fire department? They need to get out of there!"

They just watch the blaze rage on. Seconds trickle into minutes as Andy awaits the screech of sirens but hears only the sounds of the house crumbling -- until three bodies come straggling around the corner and down into the driveway.

"Mother!" Andy cries. "You're okay!"

"Yes, yes," Katherine says with a relieved smile. "I was trapped in the guest bedroom. Nick and Ryan -- they saved me."

Andy can't ignore the complacent grin that moves under Nick's mustache, but he tries to ignore it for now.

"I'm so glad you're safe," he says, drawing Katherine into an embrace. But he hardly has time to feel her in his arms before the sound of rapidly approaching sirens interrupts.

"Thank God," he says under his breath, turning back to the mansion. The flames are even wilder now, and the only image in his mind is that of Brent, pinned underneath the chandelier.

"We should have gotten him out," he says sharply, looking back at Maggie. "There's no way he's going to get out all right now."

Maggie offers another comforting touch, but he can feel her own lack of certainty in her fingers.

END OF EPISODE #209

What did you think of the blaze? Is Brent going to get out okay? What will these developments mean for the Fitches and the Morianis? Please come share your thoughts over at the Message Forum!

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